

513

PASTORAL LETTER

OF HIS LORDSHIP THE BISHOP OF TLOA,
ON ELECTIONS.

Charles Francois Baillargeon,

*By the Mercy of God and the Grace of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of
Tloa, Administrator of the Diocese of Quebec.*

TO ALL THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE, HEALTH AND BENEDICTION IN
OUR LORD.

An affair of great importance, BELOVED BRETHREN, an affair full of interest for yourselves, but which is accompanied by many dangers, will shortly occupy your attention. Our Provincial Parliament has just expired with its last Session. You will then be called on soon to proceed in making new Elections.

You cannot have forgotten the deplorable acts of violence, the disorderly and scandalous scenes of all kinds which accompanied the last Elections in most of the Counties of this Province. Those disorders were such as to carry alarm and discouragement in the hearts of all honest men of every party, who thought they saw in them a frightful sign of the progress of evil doctrines, a sure cause of the demoralization of the people, and a fruitful source of misfortunes to the Country.

For our own part, Beloved Brethren, we were both astonished and deeply afflicted. We were astonished, because we know your faith and your piety; and we were deeply afflicted, because we are not ignorant of the wrath of heaven, which these excesses are likely to bring down on you. In bitterness of heart, we have poured out our lamentations before God, with all those who love you, and who, like ourself, sincerely wish for your happiness.

But we have, likewise, not failed to understand, that we ought not to rest satisfied with merely deploring so great an evil; but that we should also use every effort to apply a prompt remedy to it.

However, to apply a remedy to an evil, it is necessary to be first acquainted with its cause. What then is the cause of those evils, which we have to deplore at present, and which, but a short time since, were unknown amongst us?

The great cause of all the evils that cover the face of the earth is, as you know, Beloved Brethren, forgetfulness of the fear of God, and of the duties imposed by his Holy Law;—It is also the fatal example of perverse men, and the wicked doctrines which they sow in the world. These are the chief causes which, within a few years, have made our popular Elections, the occasions of grave disorders and corruption.

The means of preventing a return of those ills at the forthcoming Elections, and at all future Elections, is then, Beloved Brethren, to appeal to your faith and your religion; to awaken the fear of the Lord in your hearts; to recall you to your duties; and to warn you against the seduction of the evil examples and the deceitful discourses of those who, while they pretend to labour for your welfare, work in reality but for your ruin.

Those men who find it their interest to mislead you and to draw you into excess, at the Elections, who have told you a hundred times, that you are free and independent Electors; that Religion has naught to do with politics; that in the free exercise of your liberty and independence as Electors, you could shake off every law, and say and do whatever you thought proper to obtain your object, and to procure the triumph of the Candidate of your choice; and that to determine this choice, you were bound by no other rule than your own good will and pleasure. Alas! several amongst you have listened to these discourses, and have allowed themselves to be seduced; and, in the blindness of their pride, they forgot God; they stifled the cries of conscience, and they threw themselves into the abyss.

We now come to you, Beloved Brethren, as the Pastor of your souls, in the name of the Religion you profess, in the name of God, whose minister we are, to conjure you to remember that in becoming Electors, you have not ceased to be christians; we come to declare to you, that that independence, of which you are proud before men, leaves you at all times and necessarily in the sovereign dependence of God; We come to warn you that this liberty, which the Constitution guarantees to you, at your Elections, gives you no right whatever to violate the laws of God; and finally we come to remind you that Governments and Peoples are eternally subject to the sovereign empire of God, who will judge political acts as strictly as all other actions of the life of man.

Woe then to the Government that pretends to reign without God; Woe to the People who forget God in the exercise of their political rights, and do not recognize His Holy Law;—Woe to those men by whom this scandal shall happen;—And woe, likewise, to you, if you allow yourselves to be led away by such a scandal.

You see then, Beloved Brethren, that we are far from contesting the liberty and the independence which you enjoy, as regards the choice of your representatives, either in the Legislature, or in your Municipal Councils. On the contrary, we are prepared to proclaim them as loudly as any other citizen, and to defend them with you against all foes. We congratulate you on them, and we sincerely rejoice at your possession of them; because this liberty is good and precious; it ennobles you; it gives you a share in the Government of your country; and it guarantees your rights; it is for you a source of peace, of prosperity, and of happiness, if you know how to use it.

Far from us then be the thought of blaming this liberty and this independence, which you so justly cherish, or to wish that they be curtailed.—What we deplore, and what we are obliged to condemn, is the deplorable abuse which is made of those rights; it is the criminal excesses into which you are drawn, in the name of liberty, as if you were therein authorized to tread under foot all laws, human and divine; such abuses and excesses cannot fail to draw down on you the wrath of God.

We conjure you then, Beloved Brethren, to remember, that God will one day judge your Elections, that he will demand of you a vigorous account of the intentions you brought to them, and of the suffrages you gave; and, also, of the manner in which you then conducted yourselves.

Understand well, that the right to elect your representatives was not given you to act wrongfully, but to do good. The good you propose to do at the Elections, is the public good. Therefore your right of Electors, imposes on you a duty, a duty of high importance. At the same time that the constitution gives you the liberty of choosing your representatives, God imposes on you the obligation of using this liberty solely for the public weal, and of giving your suffrages but to those men who are capable of procuring it, and who are sincerely disposed to do so.

Hence there is another obligation for you; namely, to make yourselves well acquainted with those who come forward as Candidates at Elections, and who solicit your suffrages. Assuredly you would be guilty of a great imprudence

before God and man, were you not to take this precaution, and were you to give your preference to the first man who presented himself with fine words and assurances, without caring for his capacity and his religious and political principles.

The public good which above all things you should have in view, and which your representatives in the Legislature, are bound to procure, is the maintenance of your Religion and Civil Rights. It is an essential duty for you to send to Parliament, those men alone, on whom you can rely for the defence of those two great interests. Thus you know as an unfortunate experience has shown more than once, that under this twofold consideration, you can place no reliance on any man, who is not sincerely and truly pious, and whose probity is not proof against every temptation. Hence, it is of the greatest importance, and even a duty of conscience on your part, to give your vote, at the Elections, to those men alone who are entitled to this character.

You may conclude from this, Beloved Brethren, how culpable you would be, and how great is the account you would one day have to render to God, if, by forgetting those duties and neglecting the most sacred interests of religion and of your Country, you were to act during the Elections from the base and sordid consideration of your own personal interest, or of that of your relations and friends; or through caprice, party spirit, ambition, pride, or hatred and vengeance; and if acting under the influence of similar motives, which are unworthy of a christian and an honest citizen, you consented to give your vote to men unknown to you and unfit for the trust; to men without honor, without principles, and without faith.

Nevertheless, those things have been seen in several of our Electoral Divisions; they were made known to us, and we have had to deplore them more than once; it is these things that give sorrow to every true friend of the Country.

Men have been found who carried forgetfulness of their duty and contempt for the public safety even much farther! Shall we say it! O shame! Yes, there were men base enough to sell their suffrages for money; men who promised their vote to those who offered them most money; men who gave their vote for money; who trafficked their vote for something still more vile,—to gratify their unfortunate propensity for intoxicating liquors; who gave it for a glass of rum or whiskey;—thus sacrificing for such an object their conscience, their honor and their patriotism.

It is because human justice has no punishment for those who render themselves guilty of such infamies and iniquities; and that they are merely held up to the contempt of their fellow citizens, that you can persuade yourselves, Beloved Brethren, no account will be rendered of them to the Sovereign Judge!

But what do you think of those who, believing that all things are permitted during Election times, trample under foot every divine and human precept;—who, to accomplish their ends employ every means of corruption, falsehood, imposture, calumny and violence; who labour to sow dissensions, discord and enmity amongst their Brethren? Do you believe they will find an excuse before the tribunal of God, and escape his just anger?

No, Beloved Brethren; it is permitted to make use of one's influence, to employ all legitimate means in one's power, to procure the election of a Candidate, whom we believe worthy of confidence, and capable of faithfully fulfilling his charge; it is even deserving of praise to do these things; nay, we will add, moreover, that men would have cause to reproach themselves if they were to remain indifferent, when public interests are at stake; if they would not unite themselves with upright citizens, in such a cause; if through fear, or weakness, or any similar motive, they refused or neglected to give their vote to secure the triumph of the good cause.

But it is not permitted to do evil, that good may come of it; in the eyes of God the end will not justify the means; falsehood will always be an evil; imposture, deceit, slander, calumny and injustice will ever be crimes, which no earthly reason can possibly justify. It is written "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour (1)." "The mouth that believeth, killed the soul (2);" "Nor shall Railers possess the kingdom of God (3)."

And these words of Scripture regard Candidates and Electors as well as other men, and are not less applicable in times of Elections, than at other periods of life. Conclude then with us, Beloved Brethren, that they who do those things under the pretence of upholding their cause, were it the best cause in the world, have no excuse before God, and that they will infallibly suffer the full punishment which such iniquities are deserving of.

What shall we now say of men who, in those days of trouble and bewilderment, giving way to pernicious counsels, or blinded by their passions, carry

(1) Exodus XX, 16.

(2) Wisdom, I, II.

(3) Corint. VI, 10.

their impiety to the extent of profaning the Holy Name of God by false oaths : who perjure themselves without scruple, by declaring that they are qualified as Electors ; swearing falsely and rashly that they are owners of property which they do not own, or which they own through a false and fictitious title only ? God himself has declared that he will not leave unpunished those who dare outrage the majesty of His Adorable Name (1). Woe, then, to those impious men : if they succeed in avoiding the punishment inflicted by the Justice of this world, they will most certainly not escape Divine Justice, which awaits them at the last day, when they shall receive the punishment reserved for their crime.

Such, Beloved Brethren, are the important warnings which our office of Pastor makes it our duty to give you, to recall to your attention your duties in the choice of your representatives to Parliament, in order to caution you against the seductions of perverse doctrines and evil examples, and to put you on your guard against the dangers of the coming Elections. It is in a spirit of charity and peace, and with the sincere desire of promoting your spiritual and temporal welfare, that we give you these warnings. We entertain the hope that God will grant you the grace to receive them with docility and with a firm resolution to profit by them.

But remember, Beloved Brethren, that these Counsels cannot produce fruits of salvation amongst you, and that you cannot profit by them, without the fear of the Lord, and without an earnest desire of eternal salvation. "The fear of the Lord, saith the Holy Ghost, is the beginning of wisdom (2)" He who fears God refrains from sin, and the desire of salvation is the principle of all that is good and just.

Then, penetrate yourselves well with this fear of God, and the sincere desire of saving your souls, which the Son of God recommends to us above all things. Fear this Great God, who holds your lives in his hands ; fear to offend this Sovereign Judge, who is a witness to all your thoughts, to all your desires, and to all your words ; and who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast your souls into hell. (3) Let this sentence of the Gospel be deeply engraven in your souls. "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (4)" Say to yourselves ; what will it avail me to have triumphed in this

(1) Exodus XX. 16.

(2) Psalm 110.

(3) Luke XII. 5.

(4) Matt XVI. 26.

Election contest, if I must be condemned before God; what will it avail me to have gained an Election, if I thereby forfeit my place in heaven? If you are convinced and actuated by this great truth, you will easily preserve yourselves from the dangers that accompany Elections; you will avoid offending God; you will zealously attend them, like citizens who love their country.

You will have no other object in view than the good of Religion and the State, no other wish than to safeguard your religious institutions and your civil liberties; you will be careful to choose for your Representatives, men who are capable of defending those great interests; you will refrain from all acts of violence, from all quarrels and from all hatred; you will preserve charity and union, which will ensure you the blessing of God, and, in this blessing of God, peace and prosperity in this world, and eternal happiness in the next.

Our present Pastoral Letter shall be read and published at high mass in all the Parish Churches, on the first Sunday after its receipt, and about a fortnight previous to the time fixed for voting in the Counties.

Given at the Archbishop's Palace at Quebec, under our signature, the Seal of the Diocese, and the counter-signature of our Secretary, the thirty-first day of May, one thousand eight hundred and sixty one.



† C. F., BISHOP OF TLOA,

Administrator.

By His Lordship's Command,

EDMOND LANGEVIN, Priest,

Secretary.